

The Mercy Challenge:

Forgiveness & Healing of Memories

Preface

Welcome to the Mercy Challenge!

In this Year of Mercy I hope to show a simple and personally liberating way to respond to Pope Francis' call for mercy. Indeed, I hope you will see, beginning in just the next few minutes, that what Jesus said on the Mount is personally true for you: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7, RSV-CE). This booklet will present a tool for healing and is intended to be both practical and brief so that it can be employed quickly to help readers move into greater freedom around problems of wounds and lingering negative emotions such as anger, shame and fear.

The booklet is written in three tiers per page composed of a title, a key principle and an explanation of the principle. *While you are welcome to read it from cover to cover, I actually recommend the first time reader to only attend to the titles and key principles and then go back and start the First Challenge (let's call this the Quick Start Plan).* Each time you come back to do a little more work on the challenge, skim the principles again, but linger and read more fully on the principles that seem to strike you.

Very Important: If some of your wounds are known traumas, or if you encounter traumas using this tool, please stop and read the appendix, Healing from Trauma.

Introduction: Scraping Barnacles

Key Principle:

Our wounds and our reactions to them (unforgiveness, bitterness, fear, etc.) create ever accumulating obstacles to living life fully, freely and happily, much like how barnacles on sailing vessels and ships greatly inhibit their free movement through water.

Explanation:

The problem of barnacles has always plagued sailors, and while modern building materials and paints have helped in this in recent centuries, it continues to be a constant challenge. Barnacles are marine crustaceans that seek to permanently attach themselves to firm objects (e.g., rocks; ship hulls) from which to feed. In order to keep a ship sailing smoothly, regular attention to the portion of the boat under the waterline is vital. Maintenance can range from a simple brushing with a broom or power sprayers to the employment SCUBA gear, steel scrapers, and Kevlar gloves (barnacles can be quite sharp and can cause serious injuries). Left unchecked, barnacles in their many forms can not only seriously inhibit the ability of a boat to slide through the water, they can destroy the integrity of the vessel altogether.

Similarly, unforgiveness slows us down and drags us repeatedly backwards into our stuck past. It reinjures us when we ruminate or when triggering events reawaken our unresolved wounds. This in turn can often lead to overreactions and injuries to others in our present relationships. *We too must pay attention to what is below our own personal waterline, acknowledging that it is quite tempting to pretend and hope that there is nothing there, or if there is, that time will heal it if we ignore it* (see Myths for more on this).

Interestingly, some barnacles thrive when a boat is at rest while others grow best when the boat is in motion. Whether it is in our (fallen) nature to react and get angry from our wounds, to actively run from them or to passively do nothing about them, barnacles will still grow.

The purpose of this booklet is to briefly explain unforgiveness and its consequences and then to give a remedy along with its benefits.

Defining Forgiveness

Key Principle:

All injustices demand a response. One such response, forgiveness, means to let go of our right to claim a debt, but in forgiveness we are set free too!

Explanation:

Injustices demand a response from the human heart and strategies that include such ideas as 'letting it go' or stuffing do not work well and have repercussions. There are three potentially appropriate responses to an injustice: to Forgive, to Reconcile or to Forbear.

Forgiveness simply means to choose not to lay claim to a debt. Forgiveness happens within the heart of the forgiver. *Here is the beauty, though: as we release another's debt to us* (such as restitution, an apology, etc.), *we also release our own need and desire for justice* with its accompanying anger, depression, resentment, hurt, etc. *While we commonly think of forgiveness as setting another free, in truth, we are even more set free!*

Reconciliation is always a dialogue and requires the desire for repentance and change within the heart of the wrongdoer. Forgiveness is the final a component of a successful reconciliation process.

Forbearance is generally reserved for non-moral justice issues (e.g., snoring) or perhaps for circumstances in which smaller injuries are forborne for the sake of addressing more significant concerns first.

The Consequences of Unforgiveness

Key Principle:

Unresolved injuries cause numerous problems on every human dimension: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. If you are doing your Quick Start Plan, I highly recommend you come back to review this section on your first re-read (it's lengthy but oh so important).

Explanation:

Like barnacles under the waterline of a boat, our hurts and their accompanying emotional responses (fear, anger, depression, bitterness, etc.) can attach to the underside of our heart, often out of sight or just occasionally surfacing in our quieter moments. Yet they create drag, continue to accumulate and grow, and suck the life and oxygen out of the surrounding waters. They cause us to be routinely reinjured and our knee jerk reactions can even cause harm to others. They can cause and/or exacerbate physical problems such as heart disease, cancer risks, muscle tension, headaches and migraines, as well as all manner of digestive system problems. The more severe Emotional and Spiritual Consequences are described below.

A) Emotional Consequence: Feeder Memories

Emotionally speaking, one of the major problems of unhealed memories involving anger (and this is true of any negative emotion including shame, fear, disgust, prejudice, depression, etc.) is that they create feeder memories. **Feeder memories** are pockets of emotion stuck in old unhealed or partially healed memories that create sudden releases of emotion when triggered. You may be well aware that repeated events over time from the same individual create a type of frustration that accumulates if left unresolved and unsolved. But are you aware that unhealed events from as far back as childhood can cause a similar phenomenon even across multiple relationships?

Reflection Questions:

Do you ever find yourself overreacting to relatively small triggering events (the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back)? Can you think of a time where you clearly overreacted into fight or flight mode? Can you think of an underlying and unresolved root memory for that event (see the Float Back tool below).

Feeder Memory Example:

When I was in High School I can vividly recall being on a bus in which two Jr. High boys began picking on a third boy, leaning over his seat, teasing him and calling him names. Suddenly a feeling of rage welled up in me accompanied by a strong desire to beat the bullies up. I resisted this desire and sat smoldering on the bus, unaware of the roots of my over-reaction. I realize now that this was an example of a feeder memory. I didn't know any of the boys, so there was nothing personal occurring, but the event tapped into and awakened the emotions of my own unhealed injuries delivered by grade school bullies.

Float Back Tool: How to Find Root Memories When I Overreact

A very simple tool for identifying memories that need more healing is called the Float Back tool*. With this tool, you take hold of a particular feeling (e.g., shame) and sit with it imagining going backward in time to an earlier age where you felt the same thing. Make a mental or actual note of the memory, and repeat the process going further and further back until there are no more surfacing memories. The same process could be used for a particular person to search for unfinished business ties specifically to them. This list would then be taken into the healing of memories process outlined shortly.

* This tool is used in EMDR, an exceptional type of therapy for dealing with trauma.

B) Emotional Consequences: The 3 Emotional Lies

Another significant problem associated with unresolved memories is that at least one of three types of lie will get attached to our soul (again, think barnacles), leaching into our subconscious and affecting our mood and identity.* I have found that even if the memories themselves are held at bay, the emotional lies are almost always still at work. The three types of lie are fears of getting hurt again, lies of being damaged and lies of shame.

Lie 1: Fear Based: “I’m in danger” / “I’ll get hurt”

It is quite natural that I would guard a wound of any kind from a similar hurt and most would agree that wounds of the heart are far more damaging than that of the body. This lie creates all kinds of limitations of freedom for people stuck on it. I have seen danger attached to dating, public speaking, any sort of group, making friends, joining a church, staying with a church, spending time with family of origin, trying new things, etc.

Example: John gave up on even trying to date after a bad break up and two rejections. He says, ‘It’s just not worth it.’

Lie 2: “I’m damaged goods” / “There’s something wrong with me” (Shame)

This lie casts a pall over a person’s life and any expectation of fulfillment. I am astonished at how quickly this settles over people’s hopes and aspirations and how readily people believe it to be permanent damage.

Example: Shelly awoke one night at a camp out to find her friend touching her in a sexual manner. He stopped immediately after she woke, but from that point until she worked through the forgiveness and healing, she believed in the lie that her purity was lost.

Lie 3: Guilt or Shame Based: ‘It’s All My Fault’

This lie is less common than the first two, but blocks healing because it takes responsibility for the behavior of the perpetrator. Some perpetrators will place the guilt and blame on the victim deliberately.

Example: Gina’s mother constantly yelled at her for anything and everything. She just wished she could get it right and stop disappointing her mom. She didn’t like being yelled at, but knew she deserved it for being such a no good kid.

* The presence of these three lies is yet another EMDR concept that I have found universally true. Awareness of these lies and the need to challenge and renounce them is extraordinarily helpful in achieving full freedom.

C) Intellectual/ Emotional Consequence: Habituation of Imagination

Unforgiveness habituates the mind and imagination to gravitate toward particular emotions, such as anger (thoughts, memories, feelings, etc.). This is also true with depressive thinking, anxious thinking, lust, etc. Reason becomes clouded and judgment impaired. Once the imagination gets used to one thing, it can be hard to purify it and use it freely or efficiently for other things (**to the impure, all things are impure?”).

Example 1: My ignorance at the need to forgive bullies for some mild grade school teasing led to two decades of low grade anger which habituated me toward angry thinking and rumination. I could go to bed every night thinking of ways to get even with them. My habituation resulted in me doing absolutely nothing toward the culprits. Worse, when anger did leak out of me, it was always toward the people nearest me and resulted in people I loved being hurt by me.

Example2: Tom often found himself ruminating on negative interactions from his work place. He could daily have arguments in his head with people he didn't like. He found himself getting increasingly hostile toward these individuals even when nothing negative actually happened in a given day.

D) Spiritual Consequence: Temporal

For those pursuing the spiritual life, unforgiveness creates all kinds of problems. Because the imagination tends to gravitate towards wounds, prayer and quiet can not only be filled with distraction, but can actually be painful at times as unresolved memories surface. Some people cannot tolerate silence and need constant noise or distraction.

Anger which leads to sin (hatred, aggression, etc.) can seriously impede our spiritual growth and even reverse it. Habitual sin divides us from God, from others and even creates division within our own being: "between body and spirit, knowing and willing, reason and emotions " (ITCS: Human Persons Created in the Image of God, 45).

E) Spiritual Consequence: Eternal

Most importantly of all, unconfessed, chronic, serious sin can lead a person to eternal damnation. Indeed, unforgiveness is one of the most serious sin of all, since at death we will be judged according to our own standard of mercy: "Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either" (Mt 6:14-15, NJB).'

When is Forgiveness Work Warranted?

Key Principle

Significant forgiveness work is warranted any time unforgiveness or reactions to injuries (e.g., anger; shame) are interfering with important areas of life, like work, marriage, school, faith, etc.

Maintenance is Always Easier than Repair

As with almost any area of life, maintaining a state of forgiveness is far easier than the periodic foray into deep inner work (see Keeping the Hull Clean). *Indeed, analogous with the maintenance the hulls of boats, car engines, and human bodies, regular maintenance and good practices can prevent all manner of serious problems.*

Regularly w/ any Marriage (Couples also need to reconcile)

It is almost a given that marriage partners will accumulate injuries that will go unhealed for various reasons. These injuries will immediately create feeder memory 'land mines' that the couple will step on again and again creating resentments and 'hot topics' that the couple can no longer discuss civilly due to the unresolved emotion packed into them. Forgiveness work clears the way for dialogue and reconciliation.

Reflection:

Are there any areas of discussion my spouse and I simply cannot approach anymore? Are there certain habits they do that instantly cause me irritation or anger? Make a very brief note of key memories concerning these areas for the forgiveness and healing steps that will follow.

When Depressed

There is a great old saying that depression is anger turned inward. Always look for the chronic injustice at the root of depression. Look especially at places of chronic failure, shame, hopeless or helplessness. Identify and make a list memories for the healing steps that will follow. Self-forgiveness is especially important here.

Reflection:

When I allow the feeling of shame to come up in me, what memories immediately surface that reinforce that feeling? What about feelings of hopelessness? Failure? Helplessness? Make a very brief note of any memories for the forgiveness steps that will follow.

Examples:

Mary felt like a failure and became depressed due to the choices her now grown children were making in their lives. She may need to forgive them, and possibly herself.

John felt despondent when his friends began making poor moral choices and wouldn't listen to him when he encouraged them toward a better path. Whether or not he continues to encourage them, he does need to forgive them.

Jimmy feels deeply ashamed for ways he's treated loved ones in the past. While he should pursue reconciliation with them if they are open to it, he should also seek self-forgiveness and peace within himself.

When 'Stuck in the Past'

Perhaps the most obvious examples of the need for forgiveness is when we simply can't 'let go' of events from our past. We can find these memories surfacing in our quiet times: in prayer, while driving, when we're drifting off to sleep or waking back up, etc. If the memories involve anger toward oneself, it usually feels like shame and most people instinctively push these memories deep down inside them, which is the worst place to put them!

A strong word of caution regarding Trauma:

Traumatic wounds (e.g., physical or sexual abuse) can benefit from these types of processes, but it is highly recommended that an individual with known unhealed or partially healed trauma seek out a trauma trained counselor (I would highly recommend the 'Find a Clinician' Link at the main EMDR website: <http://www.emdr.com/find-a-clinician.html>).

Example:

Hardly a week goes by when Sarah doesn't partly relive a memory of her father shaming her in front of her friends at her school. She feels strong shame and resentment every time the memory surfaces and the feelings cast a pall over the remainder of her day.

When Chronically Angry or Ruminating

While unresolved injuries are not the only cause of anger, they are a common one. They also feed the terrible mental habit of rumination. Rumination is an emotional hijacking of the imagination by a feeling. Angry rumination continually replay grievances, rehash arguments or create scenarios of retribution.

Reflection:

Do I ever have fights with people who aren't there? When nothing else is particularly occupying my imagination (e.g., when I'm drifting off to sleep), how would I characterize my mood?

Myths, Misconceptions and Obstacles to Forgiveness & Healing

Key Principle

There are a quite a few myths and misconceptions of forgiveness that can block us from pursuing the freedom that comes from forgiveness. Here I will address only some of the more common ones. If you are doing your first read through, skim this list for anything that stands out and read only that for now:

- A) I Need to Hold on to This to Be Safe
- B) Time Heals All Wounds
- C) I should Forgive and Forget
- D) They Don't Deserve It
- E) How Can I Forgive When I Don't Feel Like It?
- F) Forgiveness Means That What Happened is Okay
- G) Forgiveness Means That They are Off the Hook
- H) If I Forgive, I Have To Let That Person Back Into My Life
- I) I Already Forgave, Why Do I Still Feel So Hurt and Angry?

A) I Need to Hold on to This to Be Safe

I often see people holding on to injuries because they believe this will help them be more safe. The truth is that unresolved pain tends to make people more emotional, engaging the limbic system which has only two tools: fight or flight, both of which make people decidedly less safe in most situation. Using judgement and reason is far more effective when safety is required.

B) Time Heals All Wounds

Sadly, this is not true. Time plus another important ingredient heals wounds, namely processing our wounds. Processing is a more technical term that includes examining, understanding, learning from and growing from our injuries. Injuries of the heart require truth and love for healing, either from ourselves or from another. The Healing of Memories principles are designed to provide these to the heart.

C) I should Forgive and Forget

This is actually not humanly possible as we are hardwired to remember our hurts for many good reasons. Only God forgives and forgets. It is quite possible, as I hope you will soon experience, to remember previously painful events without lingering strong emotions or other negative repercussions.

This myth can also be misused in two common ways. First, I can impose it on myself as a rationalization for repressing a wound I'd rather avoid. Second, it can be imposed upon another in an effort to get them one to drop a subject I am uncomfortable with (men, being naturally more compartmental, are more likely to use this tactic).

D) They Don't Deserve It

This is the root of many a grudge and it immediately confuses who is the most to benefit from forgiveness. I'll never forget the day I was in a waiting room and read the following quote in a Readers Digest: 'Bitterness is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.' Grudge holders beware!

E) How Can I Forgive When I Don't Feel Like It?

While feelings can be wonderful to move us to mercy and forgiveness, and while they are great when we feel better after forgiving, emotions are not necessary to forgiveness as it is primarily an act of will. I always hope positive feelings will settle in after the healing, and they usually do, but it isn't necessary and doesn't always happen.

F) Forgiveness Means What Happened is Okay

This is a fairly common misconception and I think it may come from the sloppy way forgiveness is sometimes done in which the penitent says, 'Sorry,' and the forgiver replies, 'It's okay.' Regardless of the root, the truth is that an evil occurred and forgiveness entails releasing the wrongdoer from the debt owed.

G) Forgiveness Means They are Off the Hook

This is not precisely true since 'getting off the hook' so to speak depends on their repentance, not our forgiveness. From a legal perspective, we can forgive a perpetrator of a crime yet can and often should still have them prosecuted for that crime. Again, while forgiveness can benefit and bless another, it profoundly impacts oneself for the better.

H) If I Forgive, I Have To Let That Person Back Into My Life

There is often confusion around the commandment of Jesus to always forgive (seven times seventy times), but look closely and notice he doesn't command reconciliation, and indeed, he couldn't since that requires the will of the other person to be penitent and to change their ways. We should pursue repentance, but at the same time, we need to be quite careful around people who injure us and do not repent of it.

I) I Already Forgave, Why Do I Still Feel So Hurt and Angry?

Sometimes this is because we've forgiven without healing the wounds and you'll simply want to use the Healing of Memories step outlined below. Other times, people will forgive in general without going into and healing the particular injuries. While praying, 'I forgive so-and-so for anything they have ever done to me,' can move one toward a path of healing and can be a good first step, any specific injury recorded by the heart still has to be addressed specifically in the same way a physical injury would be treated and healed specifically.

Healing of Memories and Forgiveness

3 Key Principles: These Principles are probably the most important in the whole book!

When the human person encounters a problem or injustice, a piece of them will stay with that problem until it is resolved.

We should never have memories that bring back strong negative emotions. This is always a sign that a piece of us is still stuck.

We know a memory is fully healed when we don't have any reluctance toward or negative reactions from examining it. A regret that the incident occurred should be as strong a response as we should feel (say a 1 out of 10).

Explanation:

God built us as human persons to heal spontaneously on every dimension (mind, body, heart, soul) and we will unless we are obstructed, such as by the will, by infection or by the sheer severity of the injury. It can be quite useful to ask for help from a wise person, however, when we feel 'stuck.' As a counselor, I usually assign forgiveness work and instruct clients to return with any places the healing was blocked or only partially occurred to be focused on in the next session.

Healing of Memories (HoM) is the process of working through memories and resolving the residual 'stuck' areas in our emotions, self-esteem, in the memories themselves and even our bodies. It is sometimes called Inner Healing and the spiritual version of this is sometimes called Inner Healing Prayer. While the presence of the Lord at work in a wound can be profound, I have found real freedom rests on how whether or not we will respond to our wounds with truth and love. All the love in the universe will not penetrate and heal a wound if an individual is bound up in hatred or lies (not because of the power of hate and lies, but because God allows our freedom to choose bondage).

The Importance of Forgiving Yourself

Key Principle:

I would easily argue that the most important person in your life to forgive is you! You must be willing to approach yourself with love and gentleness, or don't try this exercise yet. Be prepared for significant resistance to doing this amazingly liberating work.

Explanation:

Normally, I would recommend listing 3 or 4 memories at a time, but for feelings of shame, just one memory up at a time. When making your list in Step 1 below, sit with the feeling of shame and let a memory come to the surface. Work that memory only if you are able.

Dealing with Reactionary Sin

Think of the place you've done some forgiveness healing work recently and reconsider your own responses that followed. Is there any place you need to use these same steps toward your own self? For example, did you react in anger or perhaps as a sulky victim? *Know that self-forgiveness for many is much harder than forgiving others. All the same, it is often the most important single step for freedom and happiness when accomplished!*

The 'usual suspects' of our reactionary sin include rebellion, bitterness, detraction, cowardice, vengeful thinking, and even the imitation of the same behaviors toward 'weaker' people.

Example: Emily was so angry with her mother for her numerous emotional problems and their repercussions in her own life that she never considered her own rather dramatic responses to her mother through her life. After doing the forgiveness and healing for her mother, she realized she needed to do some repentance work as well.

The Benefits of a Clean Hull

Key Principle:

Keeping a very short list of injuries and maintaining a habit of processing things as they occur will make dramatic differences in our ability to cope with stress (we're not already full!) and can improve all of our physical ailments that are caused or exacerbated by psychosomatic complaints (think about reduced muscle tension, headaches and digestive system distress). Sleep quality generally improves and our times of quiet and prayer become much more quiet and prayerful! Review the consequence list above and imagine your life more free of those types of issues.

Spyware Analogy

I recently inherited a laptop only to discover it was pretty darn sluggish and struggled even with simple programs. I downloaded a free malware and spyware remover and found that in its history, various consumers based websites had attached 296 unwanted little programs to it that were running in the background. One by one, they were inconsequential, but taken together, it overwhelmed my aging hand-me-down laptop. *Unresolved memories are quite like this, bogging down our capacity to handle life's normal stress levels and causing us to shut down or blow up to cope.* In my computer's case, it just slowed its way into some kind of cyber-depression.

Relationship Improvement

In any relationship: friendships, family, professional and especially in marriage. To elaborate more just on marriage, consider how refreshing it would be as a couple to have an discussion over socks left on the floor that is only about the socks left on the floor! Couples that are able to forgive and reconcile don't accumulate resentments that feed triggering events or small injustices with great big feelings of hurt, pain and frustration. Beware if you starting saying things like, 'We had a big fight last week... I don't remember what it was about, but I was sooooo mad!' If you don't recall the triggering event, then the main problem wasn't really the triggering event, but rather, the unresolved resentments.

How Maintaining a Clean Hull

Key Principle:

This goal is surprisingly easy and it is true in all areas of life: it is always easier (and cheaper) to maintain something than to repair it after it breaks down (e.g., cars, houses, relationships, prayer lives).

A Dirty Room Analogy

If I let my living room become cluttered with stuff laying everywhere, plopping a little must junk into it is hardly going to be noticeable. When it's cleaned up, however, something out of place is quite apparent and even bothersome: I am motivated to clean it up. As a reformed ruminator, this has been a pleasant fruit of keeping a clean heart: not only am I much more peaceful and happy, when something negative occurs I am immediately drawn to it and desire to restore peace and order!

“Do not let the sun go down on your anger...”

Pay attention to any negative memory that surfaces in quieter moments: when going to sleep, driving, in prayer and especially at Mass. Our hearts will tell us exactly what is bothering us unless we have put up walls against it.

An examination of conscience is a spiritual custom of taking stock of our day, usually done at the end of our day. A daily examination of conscience will go a long way toward keeping our hulls clean: “Even if you are angry, do not sin: never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold” (Eph 4:26, NJB).

Problem Solving Stuck Issues

Key Principle:

This tool is not a panacea that will work on all problems or issues, but it is a very useful one that works with surprising speed and effectiveness. When it doesn't work, use the trouble shooting list below.

Trouble Shooting

- 1) **You only seem stuck:** This usually looks like a plateau on your memory list: something partially heals, the number goes down, but not all the way. Look for related feeder memories. The brain often stores memories that feel the same in the same spot. Once we resolve all of the related memories, everything will feel better. Conversely, a memory may not resolve fully when we have other similar injuries still unfinished. This is especially true if it is in regard to the same type of wound and/or the exact same person.
- 2) **Myth Busters:** Ask yourself the following question, "What am I getting stuck on right now?" Then skim the Myth List and see if anything lights up.
- 3) **Did you put up an emotional barrier?** Think about any willful vows or oaths you may have made in anger. I've seen painfully people get stuck on a vow like, "I will never forgive my mom," or a curse such as, "I hope they go to hell." Repenting of this (self-forgiveness using these very same steps if need be) will usually shake this kind of stuckness free.
- 4) Sleep on it. The human person does a great deal of emotional healing during sleep. Numbers that drop pretty low will sometimes completely resolve after a nights rest.
- 5) Don't forget the tried and true, '**talk to someone about it.**' Pick someone with some wisdom and gentleness. If nothing seems to be working, consider contacting a pastor or a counselor.

Challenge #1: The Forgiveness and Inner Healing Model

Overview

Again, before you begin: It is very important to avoid using this technique on known or likely traumas. For that type of concern, see Appendix II.

Very simply, the next steps are:

1. Name and Rank the Memory
2. Healing of Memories
3. Forgive and Bless

Once you are a veteran of this skill, jot these three steps down in your journal or another helpful place, and use it as needed.

Step 1. Name and Rank the Memories (Create a Forgiveness List)

Find, Name & Rank the Memories (see sample chart below)

If this is your first time trying the Challenge, pick something in the medium range rather than a great big wound or a really important person (I'd recommend a grade school/junior high school incident that still bothers you when you think about it). Then work the steps. After you see that the tool works for you, choose your approach to healing. You can begin with (a) **Persons** in your life, or focus on various (b) **Core Wounds** or simply proceed (c) **Chronologically**, moving along the timeline of your life from youngest to oldest. Let's look at each:

(a) - Think about a **Person** your life (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, teachers, other family, and especially self!).

Surfacing Step: As you just sit with an image of their face in your imagination, unresolved memories will usually start to surface (if there are any). Jot down a brief title for a few memories at a time and rank each from 0 to 10 measuring how much current distress is attached to the memory (not the past distress). See Sample Chart below.

(b) - Or - Think about your core the **Core Wounds** and fears (e.g., abandonment, betrayal, rejection, embarrassment, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, etc.), sit with the feeling for a little bit, and do the same **Surfacing Step** as above.

(c) - Or – Start **Chronologically** with your earliest memories and work forward from past to present allowing memories to surface of their own accord (see the **Surfacing Step** as above).

Sample Chart: (note, this chart records all 3 Steps)

<u>Person</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Forgive</u>	<u>Rank 2</u>	<u>Memory Work</u>	<u>Rank 3</u>
Coach	Benched	4	Yes	1	---	---
	Mocked	8	Yes	7	Y	1
Dad	Accusation	7	Yes	4	Yes	0

Step 2. Healing of Memories

Note: For small wounds, this step may be skipped. If the rank doesn't drop to 0 or a1, though, come back and do it anyway.

Healing of Memory Steps

- 1) Quiet yourself; close your eyes if you want.
- 2) Bring up the memory and let it play through completely.
- 3) Then freeze the memory except for the younger 'you' (recall that a piece of us stays stuck on problems until those problems are resolved).
- 4) Go back into the memory as your present self and do or say whatever the 'younger you' needs the most (see below for ideas here) until 'they' feel better.
- 5) Re-rank the memory. Repeat this once or twice if it shows progress but doesn't drop to a 0 or 1. Perhaps sleep on it and try the next day (this can be quite effective).

Note for Christians: Bringing Christ into the memory also and receiving what He does can be quite profound.

*Various things the stuck 'you' might need to be free:

1. Validation: to be told that what happened was wrong.
2. Commiseration/Empathy: 'I know exactly how you feel.'
3. Physical Affection – especially to be hugged or held.
4. Emotional release – expression of anger that were withheld or more commonly, the need to cry.
5. To know everything works out okay later. *This is especially powerful.* The stuck part of us won't know things have worked out or relationships are healed: e.g. "You need to know that dad mellows out later and even said sorry in his own way."
6. To confront three lies:
 - Confront Guilt: e.g, 'It wasn't your fault.'
 - Confront Fear: e.g., 'It's okay to talk about this even though it's scary.'
 - Confront 'Damaged Goods': e.g., 'Everything is going to be okay.'

When you Don't know what to do:

Imagine briefly how you'd respond to a dear loved one or who came to you with the same wound and then do the same in your imagination toward yourself.

Step 3. Make the Choice to Forgive, Bless and Re-rank:

After the 'stuck' you seems to feel considerably better, try to lead the stuck you in **Forgiving** and **Blessing** (ideally, the blessing should try to correct the fault):

- e.g. (Forgive) "I choose to forgive my coach for benching me when I only made one mistake in that key game..." (Bless) "and Lord, help that man to grow up" or, "I hope he becomes more rational and mature."

If using the imagination, have both you and the 'stuck' you forgive together. If you are imagining self-forgiveness, just face and forgive the 'stuck' you in the image.

Now **Replay the Memory and Re-Rank** the distress and record the number. It may have gone up or down or remain the same. If the number drops to 0 or 1, consider it done (see the chart above).

Important Note: Don't Force Forgiveness!: If you can't bless and in effect, wish well on the other person, don't force this. You might want to look over some of the myths that could be creating an obstacle.

Some considerations for going forward this process:

A) Small Bites! / Process in groups of 3 or 4 only

Listing out too many unresolved memories can create a feeling of being overwhelmed and will usually result in paralysis and some bumpy days. Taking smaller bites and chewing thoroughly always helps digestion! One at a time is just fine if need be. Sometimes this work is exhilarating, and sometimes it is exhausting. Plan accordingly (e.g., don't do this kind of work just before having the family over for annual Christmas party).

B) Resist Resistance!

The temptation to procrastinate, minimize, whitewash, blame, stuff, etc., is very strong with this kind of work and most people employ at least one of these avoidance tools in their arsenal (I am quite skilled in several). Resolve to press on and finish what you start. Yes, it's often unpleasant work initially, but the fruit, the freedom and the peace are quite beautiful when it's done.

C) It is just fine to skip Step 2 for small wounds

When you know a memory is minor, or partially healed already just skip step 2 and go straight to forgiveness. If it doesn't heal all the way, the go back and add step 2 right back in.

D) Forgiving Patterns of Behavior

In dealing with a person who has delivered innumerable small wounds, such a compulsive critic, it advisable to process these as a group. However, there will likely be some criticism that stand out to such a degree that they should be treated individually.

Example: Jerry's father was a global critic who would find fault no matter what Jerry tried in his efforts to please and get everything 'just right.' He was able to forgive his father for the vast bulk of the criticisms in one processing effort, but needed to address two key memories separately: the time his father criticized him from something he was quite proud of and the time he was criticized in front of his prom date.

E) The First & the Worst Principle: The Generalization Effect

A rather neat event call the Generalization Effect* happens not uncommonly in this kind of work due to the fact that the brain organizes similar problems in groups. Once the brain finds a key to a problem, it is as if it runs around trying that key in other locks, and a whole sequence of breakthroughs will sometimes happen like dominos tipping over.

To expedite this built in healing phenomenon, it is generally advisable to resolve the first memories and the worst memories for a given person or wound type in the hopes that others will spontaneously resolve. Even if they don't completely process, the remaining related memories will usually be simpler to work. Conversely, leaving a large memory unhealed can falsely elevate related memories until the biggie gets processed.

* And yet another great principle from EMDR.

F) How to Process Wounds of Omission (e.g., Neglect) or which are Pre-memory?

Sometimes we are told of a wound that occurred before our memories are well formed leaving us with no recollection, yet we feel the effects any way. Other wounds are only realized in retrospect (neglect is a very common example of this). Simply use your imagination to create an image or scene that represents the known wound or neglect. Never do this with speculations or assumption!

G) False Memory Syndrome

Never presume a wound or trauma without concrete recollection or evidence. I have heard more than one horror story of well-meaning helpers, including trained therapists, telling clients that they were probably abused when it never actually occurred.

H) Don't Dig! Let things Surface Naturally

Trust in God's design for healing. Healing of Memories is not a processing involving some kind of invasive archeological dig into your soul. Rather, it trusts the heart to bring up what needs to be healed in the right time. If other memories pop up later, which is quite common, you'll know exactly what to do with them!

Challenge #2: Share the Challenge

Key Principle:

If you found The Mercy Challenge and this healing process helpful for you personally, be sure to spread the good news through respectful challenges to others via email, social media and the good old fashioned spoken word. Indeed, in our tech heavy world, we should never underestimate the power of personal encouragement or a handwritten note. See the many options to challenge others below.

Some ways to spread the Challenge:

The Mercy Challenge is free in the App Store for iPhone users and can be found on the website linked below (Android users, this will be available to you too, soon, if all goes well – see Challenge 3). Also, please take 30 seconds to filled out the Mercy Challenge data tracker. Check back later to see where the Mercy Challenge is spreading.

Challenge Tracker: This takes just 30 seconds!

- How did you hear about the Mercy Challenge?
 - Someone shared through social media.
 - My Pastor Challenged the Congregation
 - Someone personally shared it.
 - Google Ad
 - Other
- From 0 to 10, how big would you measure the impact on your life:
 - 10 Totally Life Changing in many ways!!!
 - 9: Amazing! I feel much freer and lighter!!
 - 8: Really good! I feel more free and peaceful!
 - 7: Good. This was helpful to me.
 - 6: Okay. It helped some and I'd share it with others.
 - 5: So-so. Maybe it helped, but I'm not sure.
 - 4: Not so good. I don't think it worked for me.
 - 3: Kind of bad: It didn't work and wasted my time.
 - 2: Bad: this caused more problems than is solved.
 - 1: Very bad. I'm going to picket your house.
- What diocese are you from?: _____
- What country are you from?: _____

- How many people did you forgive?: ____
- How many hurts did you have healed?: ____
- How many people did you challenge?: ____

Do you want to give feedback to the developer:

Facebookers, click here.

Tweeters, tweet here.

[Other Soc. Media?]

Share your testimonial with the Encouragement Blog

Feel free to share your story here, especially if you have a significant healing or break through.

You can opt to just share with this developer or to possibly share with others on the Encouragement Blog.

Please note: It will be the developer's discretion regarding what's appropriate to share with the blog.

Challenging an Organization or a Group

For those with both the interest and permission to challenge a whole group, please feel free to post The Mercy Challenge flier (see flyer link below) or to utilize the QR codes or various links in your publications.

[Links here]

Challenge #3: Consider a Donation

Key Principle:

If you were to ask yourself how much it would be worth to you if you could be unburdened from the past and its triggers, lies, stuck feelings, memories and somatic complaints, what would you answer?

Explanation:

Consider the figure you came up with above. Now consider making a tithe of that figure as a donation (10%). So if you thought it would be worth a counseling session (national average is approximately \$120), then consider donating \$12.

Donations will go toward the cost of developing this App and E-Book as well as to help develop a number of other books that will follow, each focusing on fostering greater unity between the mind and heart. I would love for you to join me in this mission for personal harmony. I also plan to add more variety of content to the website and App, including more self-help tools, videos, audio files, etc. Check back with the app periodically or leave your notifications on for updates.

Appendices

Appendix I: Recommendation Clinicians & Spiritual Directors

Use the tools for a few weeks as appropriate, and then re-read the materials. Don't worry so much about having all of this in your brain up front. Your natural clinical gifts will steer you very well, and the only thing that can cause real difficulties here are the emergence unresolved trauma (see Appendix II).

Appendix II: Healing from Trauma

Here's the good news: healing from trauma is very possible and trauma therapy is positively one of my favorite types of therapy for the freedom it brings to people. Here's the bad news: this is not the tool to deal with trauma, at least not without a trained professional to guide it. I would recommend finding such a professional at www.EMDR.com and their homepage link to find a therapist.